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ABSTRACT

Considerations for identifying the stages of cultural learning of individual students of English as a second language (ESL) are discussed. It is suggested that culture shock, or the shock of the new, is a common experience for those learning a second language in a second culture, and that anger, unhappiness, frustration, and even illness may occur. The ESL teacher needs to be aware of the stages of cultural learning of each student in order to give assistance in advancing from anger to adjustment and mastering the language. Carefully constructed reading and writing episodes can assist the learner in coping with particularly difficult periods of change and can offer a means of communication to those who cannot or will not use the vocal channel. This approach is based on the thesis that the act of describing opinions, emotions, and reactions requires a reassessment of these states on the part of the writer. Reading and writing topics that encourage the investigation of cultural similarities and differences, often provide a framework for discussion of personal reflection and ultimately cultural learning. Writing samples of ESL students are provided, and the following steps for the ESL teacher are discussed: (1) bring the students' ethnocentrism to the conscious level and examine native cultural patterns; (2) understand the target cultural characteristics and patterns; (3) assess the cultural chasm which lies between; and (4) build a personal cultural bridge across that chasm. (SW)

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READING, WRITING, AND CULTURE SHOCK

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READING WRITING AND.....CULTURE SHOCK?

Culture shock - or the shock of the new - is a common experience for those learning a second language in a second culture. Anger, unhappiness, frustration, and even illness may announce its presence.

But, the stages by which cultural adjustment is achieved and culture shock overcome may provide clues to the existence of a cultural critical period - a period well suited to language mastery, according to recent research.

Thus, the ESL teacher must be aware of the stages of cultural learning of each student in order to give assistance in advancing from anger to adjustment and mastering the language along the way. All communication channels should be used to do so, especially the silent channels - reading and writing.

Indeed, reading and writing between the lines by both student and teacher must not be overlooked as a productive means of identifying the stages of cultural learning of individual students, of giving personal assistance, and getting the most out of culture shock.

*Teaching advanced reading and writing is a challenge.

*Teaching advanced reading and writing in English to non English speakers is an even greater challenge.

*Teaching advanced reading and writing in English to non English speakers from five or six different language groups and cultures in one classroom is .....

Those of us who have the privilege of serving as teachers and researchers in multi-cultural ESL/EFL classrooms know that the challenge of these classrooms calls for help from every conceivable source. It calls for a state of:

1) *cultural sophistication - yours and theirs;

2) *cultural sensitivity - yours and theirs;

3) *cultural sensitivity shrouded in the psychological skin of an elephant - yours, certainly; theirs, with a little luck;

4) *a tolerance for a very nearly permanent state of ambiguity, and;

5) *a cultural detachment which can transcend all cultures (yours, theirs, and ours) to allow for scientific observation and the development of meaningful cultural learning along with language acquisition.

The ESL/EFL classroom[1] has all the appearance of a conventional classroom. It has a teacher or teachers, students of varying sizes, shapes, colors, and states of awareness, black boards, desks, and books.

It is the room in which nouns, verbs, and the mysteries of the present and past progressive as well as those nasty little English prepositions and articles can be put in their place. It is the place also where paragraphs and essays are written and texts are read.

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[1] In this discussion the term "classroom" is limited to those in intensive language programs in a target culture, although the recommendations to be made may be adapted to other contexts.

It can also be:

* a specialized world - not free of culture but free of cultural fear - an oasis - a king's X context where almost anything goes, where sticky questions can be asked and frank answers given;

* a cultural learning laboratory where both teacher and student can investigate how many ways there really are to skin a cat;

* a cultural half way house where cultural learning flows freely from teacher to student, student to teacher, and student to student;

* an artificial community - a sheltered learning environment where the usual cultural rules can be waived temporarily and the process of cultural change may be examined and guided.

That this happy state of affairs is not always achieved in the multi-cultural classroom is more often attributable to sins of omission than commission. Our students, who are learning another linguistic system, are, at the same time, being acculturated to a greater or lesser degree. The "success" of the process of cultural change can only be measured in terms of the goals of the cultural traveler; the ease with which the journey is taken can be materially enhanced by the use of a variety of methods and strategies integral to and accompanying language instruction. Such guided cultural discovery is best achieved, not in Culture 101 or "conversation" classes, but in curricula which are designed to recognize and provide guidance for learning the cultural system both as a part of, but greater than, its accompanying linguistic system. It can assist the language learner in whatever measure of adjustment will be made to both the new linguistic and the new cultural world.

There are identifiable stages in the acquisition of a foreign or second language as there are in the process of adaptation to a new culture. These processes, often concurrent, can be frightening and frustrating; they can also be fulfilling and consonant with the goals of the learners. Thus

cultural learning, as all learning, is an internal process, prescribed and limited by the motivation of the individual concerned. It is best achieved when it is self-paced by the learner, but facilitated through every channel of communication, including the silent channels of reading and writing.

Role playing, simulation, discussions, field trips, and other techniques which open the way for cultural observation are familiar and useful devices. Get-togethers with native speakers and parties have their place, but they concentrate heavily on the vocal channel. Further, these activities are often unproductive and even painful for the students whose oral skills are inadequate. Very often the students who most need cultural assistance are least able to enter into the learning cycle. They are literally struck dumb. Their frustration, which is both linguistically and culturally bound, often locks them in a stage of cultural change marked by anger, distrust, depression, and suspicion - a state which may well pass unnoticed by a teacher who is not adept at reading the very subtle but clear silent signals which are being transmitted. Even those students whose oral skills are sufficient to support intercultural exchange do not always wish to commit their feelings and frustrations to the open channel. Some things just can't be said!

Therefore, it is the thesis of the following discussion that the judicious use of carefully constructed reading and writing episodes, even in situations in which they would not ordinarily be used, can assist the learner in coping with particularly difficult periods of change and can offer a means of communication to those who cannot or will not use the vocal channel.

How do such benefits accrue? The act of describing opinions, emotions, reactions, frustrations, and even sorrow and anger appears to require a

reassessment of these states on the part of the writer. The teacher/reader who does not read merely for grammatical or rhetorical errors will be rewarded with a deeper understanding of the needs, interests, levels of adaptation, and concerns of the student/writer. Reading and writing topics which encourage the investigation of cultural similarities and differences, and comparisons by the learner of these cultural components often provide a framework for discussion of personal reflection, and ultimately cultural learning.

Theoretical support for the need to identify stages of cultural change in the second language learning context abounds in the literature of the field of second language learning and in intercultural counseling. If we agree that there are stages of acculturation marked by states of euphoria, followed by disorientation, and culture shock, tentative recovery, and assimilation or adaptation, when the full cycle is achieved, (Brown, 1980:132), then can we as teachers ignore that the best language learning period occurs probably between the stage of culture shock and tentative recovery, as proposed by Lambert (1967) or that this critical learning period, a time of stress and strain, must be used to promote linguistic and cultural mastery? We cannot. To do so is to risk leaving the hapless learner frozen, possibly forever, in a linguistic and cultural limbo armed with an imperfectly formed linguistic system with which to attempt communication in an imperfectly perceived cultural world. Noting that Schumann (1975,1976) and Acton (1979)linked social distance and perceived social distance to the degree of pidginization of the inter-language of a learner , H. Douglas Brown (1980) has hypothesized that cultural and second language learning must be synchronized and that to achieve mastery in one system before the other may prevent optimal advance by the student. He

writes: "Teachers could benefit from a careful assessment of current cultural stages of learners with due attention to possible optimal periods for language mastery." (p. 139)

Indeed, it is felt that the stages of acculturation can be assessed and progress from disorientation to orientation facilitated by encouraging silent "verbalization" of the fears, joys, thrills, chills, satisfactions and/or disappointments of the cultural traveler. Knowledge and understanding of the stages of cultural change and the probable location of a given student in that process can be of inestimable value to teachers and take them a long way toward explaining seemingly inexplicable student "problems." Further, it is hoped that the following remarks, observations, and hunches gleaned from an ESL classroom may be of help to intercultural counselors and advisors as well as teachers, for counseling problems have a way of cropping up in a classroom and classroom confrontations often end up in front of the foreign student advisor's desk.

The Case for Loaded Assignment Curricula

In the following discussion loaded assignments refer to reading and writing assignments which enhance cultural development in second language classrooms in a target culture.

The judicious use of reading and writing assignments which call for comparison and contrast of native and target cultures, even in situations in which they would not normally be used, offers a means of guiding and structuring cultural observations of the student, can assist the development of coping strategies in periods of change, and allows those teachers, counselors and advisors who are trying to facilitate this change to gain insight into the problems being encountered.

Methods and techniques developed in anthropological field work are based upon the recognition of personal ethnocentrism on the part of the cultural observer before any meaningful understanding can be gained of a new culture. Every individual is a participant observer, according to Pelto (1970), but "the typical nonanthropological resident in a foreign community returns---with a very unsympathetic and incomplete picture of the scene he has observed" (p. 92). This being so, perhaps, it is useful to take a leaf from the anthropologist's field notes and assist our students to:

1. Begin to shed a modicum of his or her ethnocentrism, by bringing it to the conscious level and examining native cultural givens and patterns;
2. Understand the target cultural givens and patterns;
3. Assess the cultural chasm which lies between;
4. Build a personal cultural bridge across that chasm.

Step number one can be facilitated by cross cultural readings, not necessarily concerning the target culture, but designed to bring into focus areas in which cultural variations make a difference. For students this may be education, family life, aspirations, or women's rights. Both reading and writing assignments can provide the vocabulary and focus needed. Writing assignments should call for exploration and description by the student of his or her own world. Assignments such as "Describe a Classroom in Your Country" or "My Favorite Food" may seem prosaic, but they are culturally loaded. Similar assignments may be given at any level, but they should be most frequently encouraged at beginning and intermediate levels.

Step number two involves examination of components of the target culture, including student experiences and understanding or misunderstanding of the observation. Here is the place for assignments such as, "My First Day in the United States," "Problems of the Foreign Student in the U.S.", and readings about "Life in the United States" (in measured doses).

Step number three calls for comparison and contrast of similarities and differences between native and target cultures, using readings and discussions to provide the focus needed. It also calls for more personalized forms of writing such as journals, personal observation essays, class reports, and even poems.

The following section of this paper contains some excerpts from student essays which are composites of personal observation and experience. These essays were written in response to an assignment to discuss impressions of Americans. The writing assignment was received enthusiastically by the students, who had lived in this country for a period of time ranging from three months to a year and a half. Their comments were revealing to the teacher and opened the way to drop a few helpful cultural hints around here and there.[2]

> Student No. 1--from Saudi Arabia: "I have learned three important things about Americans since I came to the United States. First, I have learned that all Americans are lively; they move and speak quickly...

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[2]The following excerpts were included in an article by this author published in the Gulf Area TESOL Newsletter II, Summer 1980: 7, 9.

because time is very important to them. Second... Americans are the same as the machine, they do their work...worthily but without any thinking, they just use the instructions even if it is not completely right. Finally, they do not know anything except their job, they do not know what is happened in their country."

Student No. 2--from Venezuela: "I have observed that Americans are polite, pragmatic, and organized. Wherever you are in the United States you can hear words of friendship and cordiality like, "May I help you?", "Excuse me", "Have a nice day.", "Thank you", and many others...Another characteristic is their pragmatism. Along years, Americans have worked a lot in order to create many devices which have made their life more comfortable. These devices not only save time but they also make things easier...Last, but never least, Americans are very organized. Perhaps, for the same fact that they are very pragmatic people, they have developed different ways or organization that assure them better services."

Student No. 3-- from Japan: "I have been learning about Americans since I came here last September... First, Americans don't care what other people do or what happened. For example, when I come out of my room...my roommate never ask me where you are going or where I went...Second, Americans are friendly and open-minded...When I went to my roommate's home, I

> was welcome by her family. Her mother said to me immediately: "Help yourself to everything in my home," and I was surprised to hear it. I thought that the words indicated friendliness...in Japan... we never open refrigerators or use my friend's things without permissions. Because to serve is a virtue in my country...Third, Americans like cards.. sometimes I can find cards are delivered to my American friends without special reasons...As far as I look at Americans, they seem not to care what other people do as whole, while they think it's important to keep relationships between them and their friends and them and their parents."

Student Number One, who, of course, was suffering from a clear case of terminal run-on sentences, needed some cultural as well as grammatical guidance. It was pointed out privately to this student that the United States is full of a remarkable number of diverse cultural groups, many more than in his country, and that his observations, while correct for him, should not be used to generalize too broadly. Student Number Two needed to be warned about the differences between intentional politeness and leave-taking clichés. A teacher who had read this essay and was posing as a cultural role model might have had difficulty accepting the cultural conclusions of the student; the teacher who was serving as a cultural guide might have felt constrained to lead the student into a deeper understanding of what he was

observing. Student Number Three's observations reflected the limitations of the observational field--life in the dormitory--and the cultural values of the 18 to 23 year old age group. What had been interpreted as "not caring" might simply have been a case of "do your own thing", a modern version of the cultural taboo against "putting your nose into someone else's business." The problem of the open door policy in connection with the American refrigerator touches cultural norms both in the United States and Japan. An explanation of the cultural limitations upon "helping yourself" is in order in this case as well as of the pitfalls of too literal translations of social but meaningless courtesies. We're still working on the implications of card sending.

Step Four, bridge building, occurs when sufficient interest, confidence, and spirit of inquiry pervade the classroom so that the students ask what they want to know, write about what they feel without fear of ridicule or rejection, and begin to reach out and ask. We had reached that stage in my advanced reading and writing class the day we spent two hours writing, talking, laughing, questioning about the cultural baggage we all attach to the universal rite de passage - dying. I asked as many questions as my students did. The word cemetery in our reading assignment was our shibboleth to a cross cultural exchange that left us well informed, comfortable with each other, and with a board full of words such as morgue, corpse, grief, embalming, and after life which must have baffled those who followed us in that room.

That day didn't happen by accident, but was the culmination of many weeks of encouragement to make cultural comparisons, a great deal of reading, writing, and cultural clueing in, and many, many loaded assignments.

Thus, loaded assignments and culturally sensitive reading by the teachers are essential if the learner is to progress beyond a helpless state of "how you say" marked by anger and resentment. Not all do, alas, but we should do as much as possible to promote continued acculturative progress.

Reading and writing skills are difficult to acquire, even in a first language; they are seldom acquired perfectly in a second language. However, even in imperfect or fractured form, the messages which can be transmitted are well worth the hearing. The risk of receiving uncomplimentary, if not downright false statements about matters close to the cultural core, will be far outweighed by the therapeutic value for the student and the insight afforded the teacher by tuning in on the silent channels.

Indeed, it may be that cross cultural trainers, counselors, consultants, teachers, and learners should tune in more frequently. If, as Adler points out (1972), a cross cultural learning experience takes place when, as a result of the culture shock process "the individual has gained a new perspective on himself... examines the degree to which he is influenced by his own culture...and understands the culturally derived values, attitudes, and outlooks of other people" (p. 14), then no opportunity should be overlooked to facilitate this needed process. Ideally, both language learning and cultural learning should take place slowly, over a long period of time, in the natural setting. Not all of our students have this privilege; they must learn language and culture in classrooms under intensive and stressful conditions.

Finally, in the following section of this paper a collection of essays written by advanced language students is included as examples of student writing and as the basis for a self-administered cultural reading comprehension test for teachers. After reviewing the essays, consider the following questions.

What cultural areas do these students represent?

Is there any relationship between essay content and a student's acculturative stage?

Which student is demonstrating the most insight into the demands of acculturation?

How should a teacher or counselor react to such content?

Student Number One

It is very common to give people of a country general characteristics in order to describe them. Although these characteristics may not be for everyone in that country, the general belief is often backed by a lot of particular cases.

In _____, it is said that Americans are cold/ distant. This means that they do not express their feelings openly; and to a greater extent that they are not able to have those feelings as strong we_____ do. My particular observations of American behavior has shown me that in fact, Americans are distant. They are not likely to have many close friends, friends to take and to be taken care of. I think there are several reasons for this coldness. I am going to mention three of them which I think are more important.

I think the race has to do with this fact. It has been shown that certain abnormal patterns can be transmitted genetically. So, a paranoid man is very likely to have among his children a paranoid one. This same principle can be applied to members of the same race, which have more or less the same genotype; therefore, it is possible that such coldness can be genetically transmitted.

The second reason I am going to list is the fear of other people which Americans seem to have. They try not to get very involved with strangers as a means to avoid being hurt. This behavior model is acquired during the childhood at home.

The principal cause seems to be the American style of living. Americans try not to make very deep relationships because they do not live in the same place for many years. So, without getting several beloved friends they can move away more easily in emotional sense. They will not miss their friends because they do not get friends. This is a self-defense method which their style of life has lead them to adopt.

These are, in my opinion, three principal reasons which have determined the way Americans carry out their relationships with each other.

Student Number Two

Since I came to U.S. I have heard South Americans talk about that the people in U.S. are cold. I used to hear North Americans say that European people are cold and unfriendly. I don't know about European people. However, I don't think North Americans are cold and unfriendly. When I came here, I live in the dormitory. Of course, my roommate was American. She was very kind and helped me a lot. I had no problems with her except English....I have been surprised at how many times Americans invite and visit their friends, and how open-minded they are. I have also been feeling that American people don't care what other people are doing. This is sometimes good, sometimes bad. The reason South Americans

feel North Americans are cold is the point that North Americans don't care. Even though North Americans have good friends...the relationship is not so deep. This idea is based on the idea they don't care what other people are doing. On the contrary, South Americans have a very profound relationships among themselves. They might feel uncomfortable when they see North Americans.

Student Number Three

Ideas about a particular country before visiting that country are a kind of imagination...It is far away from reality...In this essay, I'll try to reflect some of my ideas, which I had in my mind about the United States and also the ideas after visiting it.

....I have learned about America in books and in periodicals. I have learned about the democracy, about human right in America and just used to think how nicely the Americans are passing with their own rights. It is the first time that I realize, a little bit, what human right really is. The person here is regarded by the way he works and not what type of work he does...no one hates another for his status. All are equal here and the law is the same for all. Every people can express his own ideas and opinion, even if it goes against authority.

One thing sounded surprising to me at first, when I used to hear that many students in schools and universities do manual work, like dish washing in a cafeteria or as a

service man in a gas station. But now, when I'm here I realize that there is nothing hard in it. In contrary, it is honorable, that a student is saving his parents expenses...Another thing I had in my mind, before visiting this country was color discrimination. But I've looked around Tampa and I've found that browns, blacks, and whites are all getting along very well here. No scene of color discrimination has yet come in front in my eyes.

Some of my ideas that I had in my mind before coming here have been found to be true. Like Americans are self-centered, open-hearted, friendly, and serious about work. They are self-centered and do not like to interfere in other affairs.

However, some of the ideas that I had in my mind, I have found them not true. For example, when I watched American movies in T.V. screen, I used to think that Americans must be terrible people with guns and pistols, who were always fighting, hijacking, robbering banks and committing murders, etc. I sometime used to think that it might be a place of thrill and adventures - as in movies. But these ideas are not true at all. All these things are natural as in other countries and the law and enforcement is always vigilent....

In conclusion, I must say that the ideas that I had in my country about America before arriving here were mixture of imagination and reality. Now it is only reality that points out my wrong ideas and gives me a clearer understanding about America. In fact, the new ideas that I am getting are pretty good.

What can be hypothesized about the stage of acculturation of each of these students? Student Number One, who is a Latin American, was exhibiting a stage of acculturation in which he had apparently formed a number of cultural generalizations and used the assignment to enumerate a series of supports for them. His perceived social distance, or his perception of the relationship of his own culture to the target culture (Acton, 1979), had remained great and his essay indicated the extent of the boundaries of his modus vivendi. If, as Acton suggests, the perceived social distance can affect the language learning situation, then this student was not likely to be making optimal progress in language learning as his distance was great. This situation was confirmed by his generally disappointing performance in class and on examinations, his tendency to be disruptive, and his unwavering decision to do the least amount of work possible in order to pass the course. His observed out-of-class contacts were largely confined to his native language speakers. His goals were to become an engineer as quickly as possible and to return home again.

Clearly the message which this essay conveyed was "leave me alone." A strong negative reaction from the teacher to the use of stereotyping would at best have been rejected and at worst definitely counter-productive. The student had been in the United States for more than a year. He was not in a primary stage of culture shock. However, discussion of the value of balanced evidence and the risk of simplistic cause and effect statements, especially in a sociological context, appealed to this learner, defused his armor-plated belligerence, and led to somewhat improved language learning for the student and his classmates.

Student number two, from Japan, appeared to exhibit more synchronized stages of language learning and acculturation. At least, the student had lifted the veil of ethnocentrism and observed cultural interaction as a process and not as personal experience. Anthropologists will tell us this is the first step toward

true cross cultural study and, perhaps, understanding. Whatever her conclusions, this learner was dealing with observed cultural differences, a step in the right direction.

Student number three, newly arrived from the Far East, and visibly different from the surrounding Americans, composed his essay in the white heat of the euphoric, "streets of gold" first stage of acculturation. He had just arrived in the United States. His fears had been great; at first, they appeared to have been ill-founded. His relief was also very great, indeed. His language mastery had placed him far beyond his cultural sophistication, so this wondering child was to be sent into the "real world", as yet disabused of his illusions and likely doomed for some tough times. Should not a discerning teacher read between the lines and issue a word of caution here and there?

These students were all reacting to cultural stresses. Each point of view was valid for that student at a given time, and might not have been so clearly stated in any except the written form. Again, the value of dealing directly with cultural conclusions, fears, and/or perceptions in a concrete form - writing - can bring these views into the consciousness of the writer and also give the teacher/facilitator valuable insights into the acculturation process, which is such an important, but, alas, often hidden, factor in language learning.

The techniques and strategies an individual teacher may use in dealing with these cultural variables in the language learning contexts must be forged within the classroom itself and in a two-way communicative mode between teacher/counselor and student. The ESL/EFL classroom may not be the ideal place to learn either a new language or culture; it is today the frequent location of such instruction. Given this then, if we are to structure our instruction and its context to best serve our students' needs, can we afford not to listen carefully to what our students write?

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